

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

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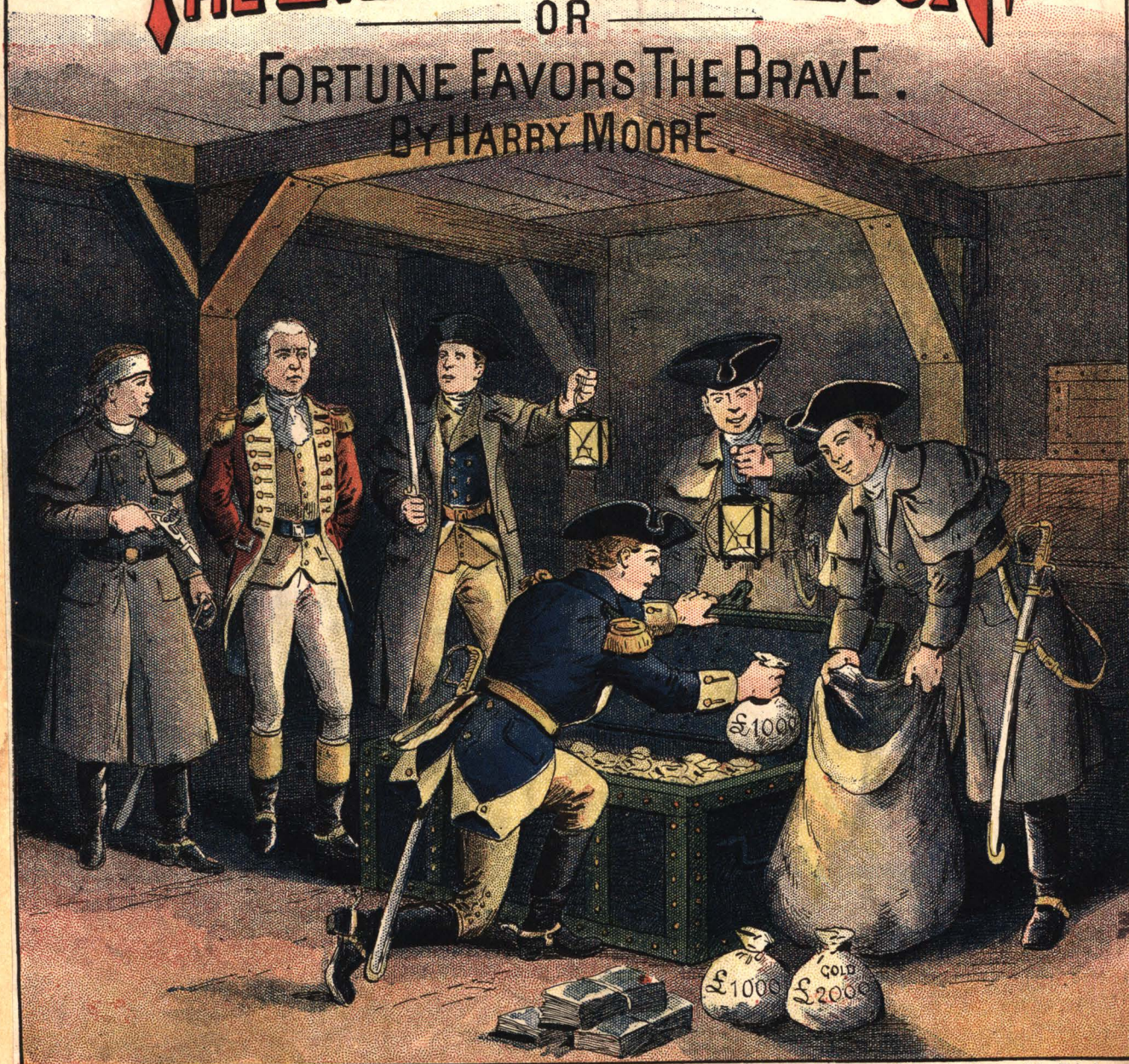
NEW YORK, MARCH 29, 1901.

**Price 5 Cents.**

# THE LIBERTY BOYS' LUCK;

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BRAVE.

BY HARRY MOORE



"The British gold will be of great help to the patriots in their fight for liberty," said Dick.  
"General Washington will be much obliged to you for your contribution, Colonel, I am sure!"



# THE LIBERTY BOYS OF '76.

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## THE LIBERTY BOYS' LUCK

OR,

### Fortune Favors the Brave.

By **HARRY MOORE.**

#### CHAPTER I.

##### AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

It was the month of May, 1777.

A beautiful girl of about seventeen years sat on a bench underneath the spreading branches of a giant oak tree.

The girl had been reading, as the open book lying in her lap would testify.

But just now she was looking up into the tree top.

She was seeing nothing there, however.

She was looking away into the distance—away down into New Jersey.

The girl was Alice Estabrook, the sweetheart of brave, noble, handsome and dashing Dick Slater, the captain of the famous band of "Liberty Boys," who in less than a year had made their very name a terror to the British.

The tree under which Alice sat was a couple of hundred yards back of her father's house, said house being about a mile from Tarrytown, in the State of New York.

Alice was thinking of Dick.

She was thinking of him, and wondering when she could see him again.

"Oh, this cruel, cruel war!" she murmured; "how I do wish it would end! I wish those horrid redcoats would go back to England, where they belong, and leave us alone! What business have they to try to rule us, anyway? None! I don't care if papa does think they have; I don't think

And pretty Alice pursed her lips and nodded her shapely head decidedly.

Mr. Estabrook, it may be mentioned in passing, was a loyalist, but his wife was a patriot.

And so were Alice and Bob, her brother.

Bob was now with the company of "Liberty Boys" down in New Jersey, and he had made a reputation for bravery and as a spy second only to that of Dick.

At this instant footsteps were heard, and Alice caught up her book and looked around.

A youth of about eighteen years stood before her.

He was not a handsome youth.

Far from it.

He had a small, bullet head, red face, shaggy hair and bushy eyebrows, a flat nose and yellowish-brown, ferrety eyes.

At this particular moment, however, he was trying his best to look pretty.

His hat was in his hand, and he was bowing and smirking at a great rate.

"Joe Scroggs!" exclaimed Alice.

There was repugnance in her tone and in her look, as she spoke the name.

"At yer service, Miss Alice," the youth said, in an attempt to be polite and courtly.

It is needless to say the attempt was a failure.

Alice's lips curled with a scorn she could not, or did not care to conceal.

"Why have you come here, Joe Scroggs?" she asked, coldly.



"Why?"

"Yes, why?"

"Can't you guess?"

There was an eager look on the face and in the ferrety eyes of the youth.

"No, I can't guess; in fact, I do not care to try. If you have any business here, state it, and then go."

Alice did not like Joe.

In truth, she detested him.

There were reasons for this.

The father of Joe Scroggs had been a Tory, and the leader of the Tories of this neighborhood.

Nearly a year before the time of which we are writing, Joe's father and about a dozen of those Tories appeared in front of the house of Mr. Slater, and after picking a quarrel with Dick's father, had shot him down in his own door-yard.

Joe was a second edition of his father, and was far from being a lovable youth.

Dick Slater had run into the house, and, securing his father's rifle, had shot Scroggs, mortally wounding him, at that same time, and had thus evened up matters in some degree, though Mr. Slater, having been a noble-hearted man, was a greater loss to the respectable portion of the community than Scroggs had been.

"So ye want me ter state my bizness, do ye, Alice?"

The youth advanced, and looked at the girl with a smirk on his face.

He would have sat down on the bench beside Alice, but she waved him back.

"You are impudent, Joe Scroggs!" she said, scathingly. "What do you want? Why are you here? Speak quickly, and then take your departure."

The homely face of the youth flushed with anger.

He opened his mouth to give utterance to angry words, but closed it again without having spoken them.

"Et seems ter me yer er leetle bit too hard on er feller, Alice," he mumbled; "I——"

"I'd thank you not to call me 'Alice!'" said the girl, her eyes flashing; "by what right do you take such a liberty?"

"W'y, hain't we went ter school tergether, Alice, all our lives?"

"One would not think you had ever gone to school!"

The girl's words and tone were cutting.

They cut through even Joe Scroggs' thick hide.

It would never do to give way to anger when on the errand on which he had come.

"I didn't come heer ter talk erbout school," growled Joe; "I come to tell ye thet——"

Joe stopped, stammered, and grew red in the face.

Alice looked at the youth in surprise.

As yet she had no suspicion of what was coming.

She looked at Joe inquiringly, curiosity getting the better of her dislike for the fellow.

"You came to tell me—what?" she asked.

Joe grew even redder in the face, as he gurgled and seemed on the point of choking.

Whatever it was that he wished to tell Alice, it proved a hard task.

"D'ye wanter know?"

Joe managed to get this out with a jerk.

"Well, I can't say that I am so very eager to know," replied Alice, coldly; "but you said you had come to tell me something. If you are going to tell it, do so; don't stand there gasping and stuttering. Tell me, and have done with it."

A look of desperate resolve appeared on the youth's face.

"All right; I'll tell ye, Alice. I—I—I'll tell ye wh-wha et is I—I've come heer ter t-tell ye. I—I——"

Joe stuck again.

"Out with it!" cried Alice, vexed with the fellow; "what is it that you wish to tell me?"

"W'y, thet—thet—I—I—I-love ye, Alice!"

It was out at last.

And it came unexpectedly to Alice.

She uttered a little cry of surprise, almost horror.

The thought that this ugly, cowardly lummo of a fellow could even know the meaning of the word love had not occurred to the girl.

And that he should dare to tell her that he loved her!

The very thought of it made her shudder.

She hated the youth, and detested him before—she loathed him now.

Alice was rendered temporarily incapable of speech by the declaration of Joe, and he took her silence to be a hopeful sign.

"Yes, I love ye, Alice!" he cried, becoming bolder, notwithstanding that the declaration was out; "I hev loved ye ever since wuz little tads a-goin' ter school tergether; an' now I'm ergoin' ter ax ye will ye be my wife, Alice?"

The youth started to sit down beside the girl, but she waved him back.

"Hush!" she cried, her voice vibrating with horror and loathing; "what do you mean, Joe Scroggs, by talking to me in this fashion? How dare you! What, you ask me to marry you! Why, the idea is absurd—ridiculous! I could never learn to even like you, Joe Scroggs, let alone



you. In fact, I hate you!—and that's the plain truth!  
Go at once!"

Joe was evidently taken somewhat by surprise.  
The fellow had been foolish enough to think that this  
beautiful girl might care for him.

He was undeceived now, however, and being undeceived,  
became angry.

"I know wot ther trubble is!" he cried; "yer in love  
h thet thar confounded Dick Slater, thet's wot ye air."  
"And if I am, is it any business of yours?" cried Alice.  
"Waal, I dunno erbout thet," said Joe; "one thing I will  
, though, an' thet is, that Dick Slater will never marry  
Alice Estabrook!"

Alice's lips curled in scorn.

"You know nothing whatever about it!" she said.

"Well, I know this much—thet he will be killed in some  
ttle er caught an' shot er hung fur er spy! I heerd thet  
e British hed him an' Bob both prisoners las' week down  
New Jersey."

"What!"

Alice leaped to her feet and looked at Joe with startled  
es, while her face grew pale.

"So thet wakes ye up, does et?" chuckled Joe. "Thort  
would!"

"You are telling a falsehood just to frighten me, Joe  
roggs!" said Alice, looking at him as if she would read  
s innermost thoughts.

"No, et's ther trooth," insisted Joe; "I heerd et day  
fore yisterday, down ter York."

"I don't believe it."

Alice said this as bravely as she could, but her voice  
ltered.

She knew that Dick and Bob were quite frequently sent  
a spying expeditions right into the lines of the British,  
and she felt that it was at least possible that they had been  
aptured.

"Et's ther trooth, jes' ther same," said Joe; "they wuz  
aptured down ter New Brunswick. They hed gone inter  
her British lines, an' wuz goin' ter jine ther army, jes' ter  
it ter fin' out all they could erbout whut ther army wuz  
oin' ter do; but they wuz foun' out an' captured, an' I  
uess they hev be'n shot er hung by this time."

The brute told this with great relish.

He seemed to enjoy inflicting torture upon the girl, yet  
only a few minutes before he had declared that he loved  
er.

Such love as that would never move mountains nor cause  
he world to revolve faster.

Alice uttered a cry and sank down upon the bench.

She covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out  
some horrible vision, and trembled visibly.

In imagination she could see Dick and Bob being led  
forth from prison to be shot or hung.

To one of her sensitive nature the very thought was suffi-  
cient to unnerve her.

But the thought recurred to her that Joe might be tell-  
ing her the story out of revenge, and that it was false,  
after all.

She took her hands from in front of her face, rose to  
her feet, and, looking Joe Scroggs full in the eyes, she ex-  
tended her arm and pointing in the direction in which lay  
the youth's home, said, as sternly as she could:

"Go! I believe you are telling what is not true just to  
inflict torture on me. Go! I hate you! I despise you!  
Go!"

There was no mistaking the earnestness of the girl.

Her looks and tone gave ample evidence that she meant  
every word she said.

Joe seemed to realize it, for he turned red with anger.

His little ferrety eyes glowed.

"So ye hate an' despise me, do ye, Alice Estabrook?" he  
said in a low, hoarse, strained tone.

"I do! You are a coward and a brute! Go! Leave  
here this instant, or I will call my father and he will kick  
you off the place!"

Alice's fears had temporarily given way to her anger.

"Oh, all right; I'll go!" said Joe, in a voice of concen-  
trated passion. "I'll go, ez ye hev ordered, but—ye kin  
jes' bet, Alice Estabrook, thet I'll hev revenge on ye fur  
this! Ye needn't think ye kin talk ter me ez ye hev done,  
an' not hev ter pay fur et! Ye'll see the time, an' afore very  
long, too, w'en ye'll be sorry fur whut ye've said ter me."

Alice stamped her little foot on the ground.

"Are you going?" she cried, imperiously.

"Yes, I'm goin'," with a leer; "I'm ergoin' all right  
enuff—but I may come back ergin. I will, ef I want'er!  
One thing is shore, ye needn't expeck ter see Dick Slater  
enny more. He's deader'n er door-nail long afore this!—  
an' I'm glad uv et!"

With this parting fling, Joe Scroggs turned and stalked  
away.

## CHAPTER II.

### JOE AND BLUE WING.

"Confound the girl!" he muttered as he strode away  
through the forest; "I would like ter break thet proud  
spirit uv her'n!"



Joe was feeling very sore in spirit.

He had fancied that he loved Alice.

Perhaps he did love her as deeply as his nature would permit.

But just now a feeling of anger toward her was burning in his breast.

He was thinking more of getting revenge than of aught else.

Alice had talked scathingly to him.

The words she had given utterance to had penetrated even his thick skin.

He brooded over those words as he walked along.

"I wish I could git even with thet girl!" he muttered.

He kicked a stone which lay in his path; kicked with such viciousness that he hurt his toe.

"I'll have revenge on her!" he declared. "I'll show her thet she kain't talk thet way ter Joe Scroggs, an' git off scot free!"

He was silent, thinking, but kept on walking at a rapid gait.

"I wish't I hed her whur I could talk ter her, an' she couldn't he'p herse'f!" he thought; "I'd make 'er sorry, she ever talked ter me the way she did."

"I did make her feel purty bad, though, w'en I tole 'er thet Dick Slater an' Bob Estabrook hed be'n captured! Ha, ha, ha! I didn't tell 'er they got erway ergin! She'd 'a' liked ter knowed thet."

"Take et all tergether, an' I guess she hain't so very much erhead uv me."

Then he happened to remember that the girl had called him a coward and a brute.

This caused his anger to rise once more.

"I'd like ter git even!" he muttered; "I'd like ter hev her whur I could tell 'er erbout Dick Slater gittin' hung er shot, an' all thet! Thet would even up things all right."

A brave and magnanimous youth was Joe Scroggs.

"Ugh! where white boy goin'?"

A hoarse, guttural voice close beside Joe caused him to start in affright.

He gave utterance to a little cry of terror, and leaped to one side.

"Ugh! white boy heap scared!"

There was contempt in the tone.

Joe looked around and saw an Indian standing beside him.

"Blue Wing!" exclaimed Joe, in a tone of relief.

He recognized the Indian.

"Ugh! white boy know Injun."

"Yes, yes!" said Joe; "I know you, Blue Wing, and I'm glad to see you!"

"Ugh!"

It was hard to tell from the Indian's expression whether he took this as a compliment or not.

Suddenly an idea struck Joe.

Why not hire this Indian to steal Alice and carry her away to his village?

Joe thought this would be a fine scheme, if he could only make it work.

He had had some dealings with Blue Wing before.

He had given the Indian information regarding the patriot people of the neighborhood and their possessions and had on one or two occasions helped the Indians and the patriots.

He had painted himself up in imitation of the Indians of course.

"Is your village where it used to be, Blue Wing?" Joe asked.

The Indian nodded.

"Yes, him where him use be," he replied.

"On the shore of the little lake, eh?"

"Um."

"Blue Wing," said Joe, impressively, "I hev got four rifles an' er lot uv powder an' bullets ter home; would ye like ter hev 'em?"

The Indian's eyes sparkled.

"Um! Would like to have um!" he said.

"Well, I'll tell ye how ye can git 'em."

The Indian was interested now.

"How me git um?" he asked.

"I'll tell ye how, Blue Wing. I want somethin' done an' ef ye'll do thet fur me, I'll give ye ther rifles an' ammunition."

"What white boy want done?"

"I want you to capture a girl, and take her to your village, and keep her there for me."

The Indian looked at the youth questioningly.

"What girl?" he asked.

"Blue Wing know Mr. Estabrook?" Joe asked.

The Indian nodded.

"Me know um," he replied.

"He has a daughter."

"Heap pret' squaw!" the Indian said.

"Yes, she's pretty enough. Well, I want you to capture her, an' take her ter yer village an' keep her there fur me. Will ye do et?"

"Do um fur rifles an' powder."

"Good! Thet settles thet, then! When will ye capture her?"

"Dunno; whenever me git chance."



"All right; an' yer'll let me know ez soon ez ye hev captered her?"

The Indian nodded.

"Me let white boy know," he said; "me come fur rifles an' powder."

"I see; well, I'll be at home, an' I'll go back ter yer vil- lage with ye, an' he'p ye kerry ther rifles."

"Heap good!" said Blue Wing.

Then, after some further conversation, the two parted.

### CHAPTER III.

#### CAPTURED.

Alice Estabrook sat on the bench staring at nothing for some time after Joe Scroggs took his departure.

She did not realize where she was.

She was thinking of what Joe had said.

Could it be possible, she asked herself, that Joe had told the truth?

Had Dick and Bob been taken prisoners?

Were they in the hands of the British?

Or, worse yet, could it be possible that they had already been shot or hung, as Joe had said he thought likely?

These things were dreadful to think about.

Alice hardly knew what to think.

She knew it was quite within the bounds of possibility that the youths might be captured.

And if they were captured they might be shot or hung as spies.

And Joe had talked as though he knew what he was talking about.

The girl was a pretty good judge of human nature, and she knew that there must have been some foundation for what Joe had said; otherwise he could not have seemed so earnest.

He might have added the portion about the two being shot or hung, however.

Alice could not bring herself to think of this as being true.

It was too terrible.

"Oh, Dick, my sweetheart!" she breathed; "it cannot, it cannot be that you are dead! No, no! I will not believe it! You are alive! I know it!—I feel it!"

The girl was sorely troubled.

"Shall I tell Edith?" she asked herself. "She would wish to know, I am sure, since she loves Bob as dearly as I love Dick."

Edith was Edith Slater, Dick's sister, and she was Bob Estabrook's sweetheart, as Alice was Dick's.

Alice remained there for half an hour, thinking the matter over.

She decided at last to tell Edith.

She would not be in a hurry, however.

She would not rush over to Edith's home and alarm her friend.

She would stay where she was until she was calm.

She waited another half an hour.

Then she went to her own home and put the book away.

"I'm going over to see Edith, mother," she said.

"Very well, Alice," her mother replied.

"Poor mamma!" thought Alice, as she left the house; "it would break her heart if Bob were to be killed! Oh, I hope there is no truth in the story Joe Scroggs told me!"

The home of Edith Slater was only about a quarter of a mile away, and by cutting across the lot it was not even so far as that.

It took Alice only a few moments to run over there.

"Where is Edith?" she asked of Mrs. Slater, as she entered the house.

She entered without knocking, as she was over there so much she felt as much at home there as she did at her own home almost.

"I sent Edith to the village on an errand, Alice. She will be back in an hour or so."

"Oh, well, then, I guess I won't wait."

"I would be glad to have you wait, Alice."

Mrs. Slater thought the world and all of Alice.

"I'd like to stay, too; but I had better get back, as I must help mamma."

Mrs. Slater looked at Alice earnestly.

"You haven't heard from Dick or Bob?" she asked, wistfully.

"No; I haven't heard from either of them. I wish that I could hear from them oftener."

"Indeed, and so do I, Alice."

"That was not a story," thought Alice; "I said I had not heard 'from' them; I haven't. I have heard 'of' them. It may be, though, that what Joe said was a fabrication."

She remained a few minutes talking with Mrs. Slater, and then went back home.

She helped her mother get dinner and then waited somewhat impatiently for Edith to come over.

At last Edith came and the two girls left the house and went down to the bench under the tree.

Then Alice told her companion of Joe Scroggs' visit, and what he had said about Dick and Bob.

Edith was frightened.



"I am afraid there is some truth in it, Alice," she said. "Oh, wouldn't that be terrible!"

"Indeed it would, Edith. We will hope for the best, however. I will not believe that Dick and Bob have—have—been—been——"

"Oh, no! We will not believe that, Alice! We will hope that Dick and Bob are alive and well, even though they may be prisoners in the hands of the British."

The girls talked of this for some time, and then their conversation turned on Joe Scroggs and the preposterous idea of his presuming to love Alice.

They could not help laughing at the idea, it was so preposterous.

It was the last thing they would have thought of, in connection with Joe.

They left the bench under the tree and wandered along the little creek that wound in and out through the timber.

They were talking of Dick and Bob, of course, and were not noticing where they were going other than that they were keeping along the stream.

No thought of danger to themselves was in their minds.

There was no reason why they should think of such a thing.

It was broad daylight, and they were close to home, and there was nothing to cause them to think of such a thing.

But they were in danger, nevertheless.

Stealing along, fifty yards behind the girls, as silently as so many shadows, were a half dozen painted Indians.

They were cautious, and took advantage of the trees behind which they protected themselves from the view of the girls, in case the latter should look around.

This Alice and Edith did not do, however.

They were too busily engaged in talking, and they wandered onward, arm in arm, not thinking of their immediate surroundings at all.

The Indians were, as the reader has surmised, Blue Wing and some of the braves from his village.

Blue Wing was bound to earn the rifles and ammunition by capturing Alice Estabrook.

He had not counted on capturing both girls, but now that they were together, he decided to do so, as if he left one she would tell who had captured her friend.

Closer and closer crept the Indians.

Presently they were within a few yards of the unsuspecting maidens, and then at a word from Blue Wing, they leaped forward and seized the girls in their arms.

The girls thus rudely aroused, would have screamed, but the Indians pressed their great brawny hands over the girls' mouths and prevented them from doing so.

Their hands were quickly tied together behind the backs, and they were gagged.

They were helpless prisoners in the hands of the Indians.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WORRIED ON ACCOUNT OF THE MISSING GIRLS.

"I wonder what is keeping the girls so long?"

Mrs. Estabrook stood in the back door of the house.

She had seen Alice and Edith go down toward the creek at the back.

Consequently she looked in that direction for them.

They had been gone three hours at least, as it was little past one when they left the house, and now it was past four.

Mrs. Estabrook had known the girls to stay out, wandering here and there talking, for as much as two hours at a time, but this was the first time they had stayed more than three hours.

"Surely nothing can have happened to them," she thought, and then she went back into the house.

Another hour passed, and still the girls had not returned to the house.

Mrs. Estabrook was quite uneasy now, and she left the house and made her way to the bench under the giant oak where she knew Alice spent much of her leisure time.

The girls were not there.

She called the girls' names.

There was no response.

"That is strange," the frightened woman murmured. "I do not understand it. I never knew them to stay away so long before."

She called again.

Still there was no response.

Then the thought struck her:

"It is barely possible that they have returned by a round about way, and are at Mrs. Slater's. I'll go and see."

She hastened away in the direction of Mrs. Slater's house.

It was not far, and she was soon there.

Mrs. Slater became very much alarmed when informed of the absence of the girls.

She did not know what to think.

"I am afraid something has happened to them," she exclaimed; "surely they would not have stayed away so long otherwise."

"Let us hope not," said Mrs. Estabrook; "let us hope for the best. Perhaps they will return soon."



"You say they have been gone four hours?"

"Yes, just about that."

"Then something has happened to them."

Mrs. Slater's voice trembled, and tears came to her eyes.

"Oh, dear, what will become of me!" she exclaimed.

"Dick far away in the army, and Edith lost!—what shall I do! oh, what shall I do!"

"Be brave," said Mrs. Estabrook, gently and kindly; "perhaps the girls are safe, and will be back very soon. They may even be over at the house now."

"Oh, let's go over at once and see!"

"Very well; come along."

Mrs. Slater closed the door of her house and accompanied Mrs. Estabrook over to her house.

The girls had not yet returned.

"They are not here," cried Mrs. Slater; "oh, they are lost! Something terrible has happened to them!—I know it! I feel it!"

She burst into tears.

Mrs. Estabrook, who was of a less emotional nature, though feeling as deeply, perhaps, did her best to comfort her friend and reassure her.

"They will be back soon, I am sure," she said; "they have wandered farther than they thought, and it has taken them longer to get back."

"They will not come!" declared Mrs. Slater; "I am sure of it!"

"Sam will be here soon," said Mrs. Estabrook; "and then he will go in search of them."

"Oh, I wish he were here now!"

Half an hour later Mr. Estabrook put in an appearance.

He had been at work in the field, and although he was tired, he started at once in search of the missing girls.

"Don't fret," he said to the frightened women; "I'll have them back before long."

"Oh, I hope so!" half moaned Mrs. Slater.

"I will, never fear," and with this Mr. Estabrook started in search for the girls.

Mr. Estabrook knew the girls well, and was cognizant of the fact that they were in the habit, since warm weather had set in, of strolling off through the timber, talking of Dick and Bob.

"The little simpletons!" he murmured; "to so forget themselves as to wander so far away! They ought to be more careful, and not cause their mothers such worry."

He made his way to the bench under the oak tree.

Then he made his way down to the creek.

"Ah!" he murmured; "here are their tracks! They have gone up along the creek."

He was confident the girls would follow the stream, so he set out at a good pace, and walked rapidly along the bank.

To make sure, however, he stopped occasionally, and examined the ground, where it was soft, to see if he could find the tracks of the girls' feet.

Each time he looked he found the tracks, and he walked onward with renewed energy.

"The little simpletons!" he murmured; "they ought to have known better than to wander so far!"

He was walking along at a swift pace, looking down at the ground, when suddenly he paused and an exclamation escaped him.

"What does that mean?" he cried.

He dropped upon his knees and began looking at the ground very closely.

"Here are the girls' tracks," he murmured; "and there are other tracks, as well; and—yes—as sure as I live they are Indians' tracks!"

Mr. Estabrook paused and looked all around him.

"Can it be possible that the girls have been captured by Indians?" he murmured; "that would be terrible! Surely it cannot be!—and yet—it looks as though there had been some kind of a struggle here! It has that appearance!"

Mr. Estabrook had grown pale.

The belief had become fastened upon him that the girls had been captured by Indians.

Mr. Estabrook leaped to his feet.

"I will look farther on," he murmured; "and if the girls' tracks and the Indians' go along together, I shall feel sure the red fiends have captured the girls!"

He moved forward a few yards, and examined the ground carefully.

He found the tracks of the girls' shoes.

The moccasin tracks of the Indians were there also.

He followed the tracks slowly and carefully for a distance of perhaps fifty yards, and then they left the bank of the little stream and led off through the timber.

"That settles it!" Mr. Estabrook said, hoarsely; "the girls have been captured by a prowling band of Indians! This is terrible! It could scarcely have been worse!"

Mr. Estabrook stood for a few moments undecided.

"Shall I go on, and try to follow the trail and rescue the girls, or shall I go back and tell the women folks the worst at once?" he asked himself.

"The chances are that I should be unable to rescue the girls offhand, so I would be gone all night, and if I kept after the Indians till I succeeded, I might be gone a week,



and Lizzie and Mrs. Slater would be wild with anxiety. They would not know what to think. I had better hasten back, break the news to them as gently as possible, and then get my rifle and plenty of ammunition and set out on the trail of the red demons."

Mr. Estabrook was a man of prompt action, once his mind was made up.

He turned on his heel and made his way back in the direction of his home with all possible speed.

"It is going to be hard to tell them the dread news," he thought; "but it has to be done. There is no getting around it; and it is better they should know the worst at once."

He walked as rapidly as he could, and even then it was more than half an hour later before he reached his home.

As it was summer time, however, it was yet light, the sun being more than an hour high yet.

As Mr. Estabrook approached the house he paused, as he saw a couple of horsemen ride up in front of the house and dismount.

Mrs. Estabrook and Mrs. Slater had not seen Mr. Estabrook approaching.

Their attention had been attracted to the two horsemen, and as the latter dismounted, the two women gave utterance to exclamations of delight, and ran down toward the newcomers.

"It is Bob and Dick!" exclaimed Mr. Estabrook; "thank God! Their coming is opportune, for it will give their mothers something to think about, and they will be of great service in helping to find and rescue the girls."

## CHAPTER V.

### DICK AND BOB'S OPPORTUNE ARRIVAL.

The newcomers were indeed Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook.

They were the youths who had already made their names famous as soldiers and spies in the patriot army.

The youths were each eighteen years of age.

They were both handsome as youths could be.

Both were brave and noble-hearted and chivalrous.

Each was in love with the other's sister; hence they were the best of friends.

"Where are the girls?" asked Dick, looking around, after they had greeted the two women.

The youths wondered why the girls were not present.

It was the first time they had come home since the war had begun and did not find the girls present to greet them.

The sober look returned to the faces of the women. In their delight at seeing their sons they had for a moment forgotten the missing daughters.

"We don't know where they are, Dick," said Mrs. Estabrook.

"You don't know?" exclaimed Dick.

"What do you mean, mother?" cried Bob.

The youths turned pale.

"Explain, Lizzie; I can't!" said Mrs. Slater, and Mr. Estabrook did so in as few words as possible.

"And you say father has gone to search for them?" asked Bob.

"Yes; he has been gone more than an hour."

"Oh, well, he'll be back with the girls in a few minutes—where he is now!" as he caught sight of the approaching figure of his father.

"And the girls are not with him!" exclaimed Dick, his face turning even paler.

Cries of fear and dismay escaped the two women.

"Where can the girls be?" exclaimed Mrs. Estabrook.

"We'll soon know whether or not he found any traces of them," said Dick.

Mr. Estabrook approached quickly, and shook hands heartily with the youths, and greeted them with words of welcome before they could ask him about the girls.

Then Mrs. Estabrook broke in with:

"Oh, Sam! Did you find any traces of the girls?"

Mr. Estabrook hesitated.

He did not know how to break the dread news to them.

He looked at the youths half appealingly.

They took alarm at once.

"What is it, father?" asked Bob; "tell us! Where are the girls?"

"Oh, something dreadful has happened!" gasped Mrs. Slater; "I knew it! I knew it!"

She reeled, and would have fallen had not Dick caught her in his strong arms and held her.

"Have courage, mother," he said; "the girls are safe, I am sure."

"Tell us at once, Sam! Tell us the worst!" cried Mrs. Estabrook. "Oh, surely the girls are not dead!"

"No, they are not dead," said Mr. Estabrook.

"What has happened to them, then?" asked Bob; "where are they? Did you learn nothing of their whereabouts?"

Mr. Estabrook nodded.

"I think I know where they are," he said; "that is, I think I know what has become of them."

"What?—oh, tell us, Sam!" from his wife.

"We will—be—brave!" said Mrs. Slater, tremblingly.

"Yes, tell us what you think has become of the girls, Mr.



Estabrook," said Dick. "It is better that we should know, once."

"Well," said Mr. Estabrook, "I guess it will be best. I am inclined to suspect, from what I have seen, that the girls have been captured by a prowling band of Indians."

He told this in the most matter-of-fact manner possible.

He did so, in order to take the terror of the statement away from it as much as possible, so as not to shock the women any more than could be helped.

But at the best it was a severe blow.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Slater; "the girls captured by Indians?—horrible!"

Then she began weeping as if her heart would break.

"Bear up, mother! Be brave!" said Dick, kissing her. "Bob and I will go at once, and we will find and rescue the girls. Do not be afraid. We will bring them back very soon."

"Oh, I pray that you may succeed, my son!" the poor woman sobbed.

"Come into the house," said Mrs. Estabrook. "You can sit down then, and will feel more comfortable."

She led the way, the others following, and Dick supported his mother until they were in the house, when he seated her gently on a home-made lounge.

"Now," said Dick, turning to Mr. Estabrook, "tell us what you saw that made you think the girls have been carried away by Indians?"

Mr. Estabrook did so.

He told about the tracks, and when he had finished Dick and Bob leaped to their feet.

"We will go at once in search of the girls!" said Dick, his eyes glowing with a great resolve; "and we will not return until we can bring them with us!"

"That's right!" declared Bob; "we will leave our horses for you to take care of, father. We cannot afford to take any time."

"True; I will attend to them after I come back. I had better go with you to the spot where the tracks start off through the timber, away from the creek, hadn't I?"

"Yes," replied Dick; "but then you must come back as quickly as possible, so as to help keep up the courage of your wife and my mother."

The three exchanged a few more words with the two women, encouraging them all they could.

Then they took their departure.

Mr. Estabrook took the lead, as he knew the way.

He walked rapidly, but not too rapidly to suit the youths. They could have run.

But they knew Mr. Estabrook could not run any distance, they contented themselves with the pace he set.

He led the way along the little creek to the point where the tracks left the stream, and here he paused.

"Here the trail leaves the creek, boys," he said. "Take a look and see if you think you can follow the trail."

The youths bent over and examined the ground carefully.

"I think we can follow the trail without much difficulty, Mr. Estabrook," said Dick.

"I am sure of it," said Bob, excitedly.

"There is no doubt, you think, that the girls have been captured by Indians?"

"No," replied Dick; "they have been captured by Indians, and there were six or seven of the scoundrels."

"You had better hurry back home, father," said Bob; "mother and Mrs. Slater will be very nervous there by themselves. We will follow up this trail, and I think we will be able to run onto the scoundrels before long."

"Well, be very careful, boys," cautioned Mr. Estabrook. "We don't want to lose you as well as the girls."

"Oh, it is the Indians who will need to be careful," said Dick, grimly. "Some of them are likely to get hurt before Bob and I get through with them!"

"Be careful," again cautioned Bob's father; "remember they are cunning and treacherous. Don't let them outwit you."

"We won't, father," said Bob.

Then Mr. Estabrook shook hands with the boys and started on his return to his home.

Dick and Bob at once started to follow the trail left by the Indians.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ON THE TRAIL.

It was slow work.

They made as rapid progress as they could, however.

The sun would soon go down.

Then darkness would come, and they would be unable to follow the trail.

It was hard work, as it was.

The sun had sunk so low that it did not penetrate the timber to do any good to speak of, and the youths were in semi-darkness.

"What'll we do when it gets too dark to follow the trail, Dick?" asked Bob.

"I don't know, Bob."

"Do the best we can, eh?"



"Yes."

"I suppose we will have to camp on the trail, and take it up in the morning."

"Likely, Bob."

"Great Guns! I don't like that prospect!" said Bob. Neither did Dick.

"We can't help ourselves, though, Bob, I guess," he said.

"We'll have to stand it, whether we like it or not, eh?"

"Yes."

The youths followed the trail just as long as they possibly could do so.

They even got down on their hands and knees and crawled along, after it got so dark they could not see the tracks by bending over.

At last it grew so dark they could not see the tracks at all, however, no matter how closely they got their faces to the ground.

Then they reluctantly gave up trying to go farther.

"Say, will we have to squat here all night, Dick?" asked Bob.

"I rather expect we shall have to do so, Bob."

"Without anything to sleep on?"

"We can gather some leaves."

"And without anything to eat?"

"We have gone hungry many times."

"Yes, but it isn't pleasant."

"That's true."

"Drat the Indians! Dick, I wish I had a couple of the red scoundrels by the throats! I'd bump their heads together in a way that would make them see stars!"

"There is one thing, Bob; we won't have to build a fire to keep warm by."

"No; we will be plenty warm without a fire."

"That is lucky, as if we had to have a fire the Indians might slip up on us as we slept and murder us."

"Ugh!" shuddered Bob; "that is an ugly-sounding word, Dick!"

"It isn't pleasant."

"Not a bit of it."

"Well, let's get to work, Bob."

"What doing?"

"Fixing our beds."

"Oh, yes."

The youths went to work.

They cut small bushes and limbs off the trees, and made quite a large pile of these.

"That will make a very comfortable bed for us, Bob," said Dick, when they had finished.

"Yes—provided a wildcat or two, or a timber rattle-

snake don't come along and insist on sharing our bed with us," said Bob, somewhat dubiously.

"Oh, I guess there is no danger of that," said Dick.

"I hope not, Dick"

The youth climbed up on top of the pile of brush and down.

"Jove! I wish I had something to eat!" half groaned Bob. "I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"Go to sleep and forget about it, Bob."

"That's good advice, Dick; but it's hard to take."

Under other circumstances Dick would have laughed. Bob's tone was so lugubrious; but the uncertainty regarding the fate which had overtaken the girls weighed on his mind to such an extent that he could not even smile.

He was thinking of his sweetheart, Alice, and of sister, Edith, and wondering where they were and how they were faring.

"Ah, those scoundrelly redskins!" he thought, unconsciously gritting his teeth so hard that Bob heard it.

"What are you gritting your teeth about, Dick?" asked.

"I was thinking about those dastardly Indians, Bob."

"H'm! I pity the redskin you get hold of when you happen to be feeling like that."

Bob without doubt loved Edith Slater as dearly as Dick loved Alice, but his temperament was such that he was enabled to keep anything from taking hold upon him and make him miserable.

The youths had been silent for several minutes, when suddenly Dick raised himself to a sitting posture.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Bob.

"Hist!" whispered Dick; "I hear voices."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE YOUTHS IN LUCK.

The youths listened intently.

Sure enough, the sound of voices could be heard.

They judged from the sound that there were two persons approaching.

They knew the persons were approaching, for the voices were growing more and more distinct.

"They'll come close to us," whispered Dick; "keep quiet and listen. They may be in some way connected with the disappearance of Alice and Edith."

The youths kept perfectly quiet.

Nearer and nearer came the voices.



Then presently the sound of footsteps was heard. The youths judged that the persons in question would pass within a few yards of where they were.

As the newcomers approached their language gradually became intelligible.

"My, but these rifles are heavy!" they heard one of the fellows say.

Dick gave a start.

"That's Joe Scroggs' voice," he whispered to Bob.

"I believe you are right," whispered Bob in reply.

"Pret' heavy," was the reply of the other fellow; "heap good rifles."

"That's an Indian," whispered Dick, his voice trembling with eagerness.

"I guess you are right, Dick."

Dick's mind was working rapidly.

He knew that Joe Scroggs hated him.

Indians had carried the girls off; here was Joe in company with an Indian.

Could Joe have been instrumental in the disappearance of the girls?

Could he, out of revenge, have had the girls captured?

Dick listened eagerly.

He hoped that the conversation of the two would explain this point.

"So you captured both girls, instid uv only one, did yer?"

was the next remark the youths heard given utterance to, and both started, and Dick nudged Bob, and whispered:

"We are on the right track, Bob! That is one of the Indians who captured the girls, and Joe Scroggs had something to do with it!"

"You are right, Dick. Oh, the cowardly, hulking scoundrel! I'll settle with him for this!"

"Yes, we captured both girls," was the reply of the Indian; "they both togedder, an' we had to take um, so one could not go back home an' tell about us."

"I see; well, et won't hurt ennythin'."

"No; white boy can make one girl him squaw, an' Blue Wing will take udder girl for him squaw," said the Indian, and it was evident from his tone that he was in sober earnest.

"The cowardly, good-for-nothing bru——"

"Hist!" cautioned Dick, gripping Bob's arm.

His excitable, impulsive companion had nearly spoken aloud.

Dick was very angry also, but he was able to control his feelings better.

"What was that?" asked the Indian.

"The wind in the trees," replied Joe Scroggs—for the two were indeed he and the Indian, Blue Wing.

Nearer and nearer came the two.

Dick kept a restraining hand on Bob's arm.

He was afraid his companion would be unable to restrain himself, and would leap up and attack the two as they passed.

And Dick did not wish this to be done.

He had a better plan.

"We must let them pass us unmolested, Bob," he said, "and then we can follow them and they will lead us straight to where the girls are hidden. It will be better than waiting until morning, and following the trail at a snail's pace."

"So it will," was the reply.

Joe Scroggs and his Indian companion passed within ten yards of where Dick and Bob sat, but the youths were as silent as death, and of course the two precious rascals never suspected the presence of their foes.

They passed on, and the youths silently slipped down off the pile of boughs and stole along behind the two.

Half an hour later they arrived at an Indian village which was located on the shore of a little lake amid the Westchester hills.

"We have run them to earth, Bob," whispered Dick, joy in his tones; "we will find the girls here."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AT THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

Camp-fires were burning in an open space in front of the Indians' teepees.

Around the fires were gathered a motley collection.

There were braves, squaws, papposes and dogs by the dozen.

It was a unique and picturesque scene.

That is, had it been seen under other circumstances.

Dick and Bob did not think of this feature of the scene now.

Their thoughts were on the captive maidens.

Where were the girls?

That they were in one of the teepees the youths were confident.

But which one were they in?

That was the question.

And it was a hard one to answer.

The teepees all looked alike.

So it would be a hard matter to learn in which the girls were detained.



There was one way the youths thought of.

Doubtless Joe Scroggs would visit the teepee in which were the girls.

By watching him they might be enabled to find out what they wished to know.

They had kept their eyes on Joe and Blue Wing.

The entrance of the two into the camp excited considerable stir.

A number of the braves crowded around them and examined the rifles.

They gave utterance to guttural exclamations of delight.

It was evident that they would like to own the weapons, and no doubt Blue Wing was already figuring on what good trades he would get out of them for the three extra rifles besides the one he intended to keep for his own use.

Several of the braves began dickering with Blue Wing, and he became so interested in the pending negotiations that he paid no attention to Joe, who kept asking the Indians to show him to the teepee occupied by the girls.

"By'm by!" the Indian replied, occasionally, and went on with his dickering.

Joe finally sat down and watched affairs in silent disgust.

"This beats the dickens!" he thought; "I don't s'pose them Injuns'll git through tradin' fur four houhs 'n I'll hev ter wait till they do git through."

One stalwart brave was engaged in an animated discussion with Blue Wing.

The discussion was carried on in the Indian language, with the intricacies of which Joe was not familiar, but he soon gathered from the tones and gestures of the two that the discussion was far from friendly.

Perhaps the big Indian wanted the rifle as a gift, and Blue Wing refused to be so generous.

Or, maybe Blue Wing owed the big brave a debt of some kind, and the fellow insisted on taking a rifle in payment of said debt.

Anyway, they were angry, and quarreled fiercely.

No doubt they called each other names in the Indian language.

At any rate, Blue Wing suddenly leaped forward, grabbed the rifle which the big fellow was holding, and tried to jerk it away from him.

The big fellow resisted, and a struggle for the possession of the weapon ensued.

The other braves stalked away a short distance, and watched the struggle stolidly.

"Great Guns! They're fighting over the rifle, Dick!" whispered Bob.

"Yes," replied Dick; "well, if they kill each other, much the better. There will be fewer for us to have bother with."

"That's right, Dick."

The struggle waged furiously.

The big brave was stronger than Blue Wing, but not so supple and active.

Blue Wing was like a panther.

Joe Scroggs was badly frightened.

He thought Blue Wing was going to be killed.

As his dealings had been with this Indian, if he were killed it would make it awkward for him.

The other Indians might not be willing to carry out the understanding he had with Blue Wing.

He, therefore, earnestly hoped Blue Wing would win.

He had been sitting near by when the struggle commenced, and as the two in moving about, approached him he started to get up to get out of their way.

He was too late.

Blue Wing gave the big fellow a shove just at that instant, and the Indian's feet struck against the youth.

He made a desperate attempt to keep from falling, but could not.

Down he went squarely on top of Joe, who uttered a yell of pain and terror, as the combined weight of the two Indians came down upon him, flattening him out like the proverbial pancake.

"Good!" exclaimed Bob in a whisper; "good! I hope they will smash the life half out of the young scoundrel!"

"So do I, Bob," said Dick; "it serves him right."

Poor Joe did not think so evidently, and he kept on trying to yell, though his yells were mere squeals, he was pressed down so hard, and he kicked out wildly and flailed the atmosphere with his arms.

It was really a comical spectacle, but at the same time it had a serious aspect, for the Indians were fighting for life.

They were not engaged in mere play.

There was no make believe, no sham battle about the affair in which they were engaged.

This was proved a few moments later, when Blue Wing having succeeded in drawing his tomahawk as they were going down, split the big brave's skull with a single blow, killing him instantly.

"Great Guns, Dick! He killed the big buck, sure as you are living!" said Bob in an awed whisper.

"Yes; that puts an end to the affair, sure!" said Dick.

Blue Wing leaped to his feet, and, giving vent to a wild, blood-curdling shout of triumph, waved the rifle in the air with one hand and the tomahawk with the other.



Then he danced about and executed all kinds of grotesque maneuvers—all in celebration of his victory.

The other braves stood in stolid silence, and looked on, until Blue Wing stopped dancing, and said something to them, and then they moved forward, a half dozen of them, and, lifting the body of the dead Indian, they bore it away into the timber.

And then Joe Scroggs, frightened almost to death, scrambled to his feet.

He looked wildly around, and would no doubt have taken to his heels had not Blue Wing said something to him that restrained him.

This incident ended the dickering among the braves for the present.

Doubtless Blue Wing himself feared he might get into trouble with some more of his braves, and decided to wait until some more propitious moment to finish trading with his fellows.

He again spoke to Joe, who nodded vigorously, and made a reply, though of course Dick and Bob were too far away to hear what was said.

They knew the substance of it a few moments later, however, when Blue Wing and Joe left the crowd and walked toward one of the teepees.

"They are going to the teepee occupied by the girls, Dick," whispered Bob, excitedly and eagerly.

"I guess you are right," was Dick's reply.

They watched the two, and saw them enter a teepee at the farthest side of the encampment.

The youths then left their position and stole around, until they were within perhaps twenty yards of the teepee in question.

The youths had managed to get the teepee exactly between them and the crowd around the camp-fires.

Then, too, the light from the camp-fires reached the teepee only faintly.

"Bob," whispered Dick, "you stay here and be ready to come if I need you. I am going to crawl up close to the teepee and hear what is being said."

"All right; but be careful, Dick."

"I will be."

And then Dick began crawling toward the teepee on his hands and knees.

He had scarcely more than gotten started—was perhaps ten feet out in the open ground, when the sound of approaching footsteps was heard.

"It is that gang of Indians who carried the dead one away," thought Dick, in dismay. "I had forgotten about them."

He was in imminent danger of being discovered.

Dick realized this.

So did Bob.

He gave utterance to a sibilant "Hist!" in warning to Dick.

The youth was already acting.

Whirling, without rising to his feet, Dick ran on his hands and knees back to the cover afforded by the trees.

Nor was he an instant too soon.

As he disappeared within the edge of the timber the half-dozen Indian braves emerged from the woods at a spot perhaps fifteen yards from where Dick and Bob were concealed.

They walked back to the camp-fires and rejoined their comrades.

"Say, that was a narrow escape, Dick," whispered Bob.

"So it was, Bob."

Dick waited a few moments, and then started once more.

He had better success this time.

There was no interruption to interfere with his plans.

He crawled slowly and stealthily forward.

Dick knew he was attempting a difficult and dangerous feat in venturing to approach the teepee.

He was not afraid that Joe Scroggs would hear him.

It was Blue Wing, the Indian, whom Dick feared.

The Indian's sense of hearing was very acute.

Long training in the woods had developed an abnormal faculty in this respect.

So the youth knew that if he made the least noise, if he broke a twig or rustled the leaves, Blue Wing would hear and investigate immediately.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE CAPTIVES.

Alice and Edith were terribly frightened when they found themselves prisoners in the hands of the Indians.

They had never been more frightened in their lives.

That there were Indians in the neighborhood they had had no doubt, but they never for a moment thought the red fiends would dare attempt to capture them.

They were taken entirely by surprise.

After their capture they resigned themselves to the inevitable as philosophically as possible, and walked along with their captors.



They wondered where they were being taken.

And they wondered how it would end.

Then they thought of their mothers.

How frightened they would be when the girls failed to return!

The girls felt sad when they thought of how terrified their mothers would be.

"Father will come in search of us, though," thought Alice; "and he will find and rescue us."

And then another thought came to her:

Dick!

Ah, if he only knew!—if he were only at home!

He and Bob, if they were at home, would rescue them.

"But Dick and Bob are away off, down in New Jersey," she thought; "and it is useless to think of them now."

Little did she think that Dick and Bob were at that very moment riding along the road leading to their homes, and only a few miles distant.

Had the girls known this, the very knowledge would have made them happy.

The knowledge would have given them courage.

But they were brave girls, naturally, and they were bearing up under their misfortune nobly.

The Indians and their captives walked through the timber for perhaps an hour, and then they came to an Indian village.

The village was on the shore of a little lake.

There was a little semi-circular open space on the shore of the lake, with the timber all around, and the teepees, or Indian lodges, were in this open space.

There were dozens of braves, squaws, papposes, and scores of dogs here, and the arrival of the Indians with the two prisoners created quite a stir.

The squaws and papposes crowded around the girls, and jabbered and talked in their heathenish language, and the girls shuddered.

There was something very repulsive about the dirty, ugly squaws and impish children.

They could say nothing to each other, to relieve their feelings, for they were still gagged.

Blue Wing said something to the squaws and papposes, and they dispersed, much to the relief of the girls.

Blue Wing and a couple of the braves escorted the girls to a teepee, and led them inside.

There were several stout stakes driven in the ground within the tent, and to a couple of these stakes the girls were bound.

Then the gags were removed from their mouths.

"Now, white girls can talk of um want to," said Blue

Wing. "No do good to holler," he added; "nobody hear. Uf do holler, me come back an' put gag back in mouths."

The girls hastened to assure the Indian that they would not cry out.

"Good!" grunted the Indian; "white girls heap smart!"

"Thank you!" said Alice, sarcastically.

But the sarcasm was lost on the Indian.

He grunted, and then, with his companions, left the teepee.

The girls looked at each other with eyes in which fear and anxiety were plainly shown.

"This is dreadful, terrible, Alice!" said Edith.

"So it is, Edith."

"What will become of us?"

"I don't know. I think father will find and rescue us, however."

The girl tried to talk bravely.

But it was hard work.

The voices of both trembled.

They were racked with doubt and suspense.

They did not know why they had been captured.

They could not imagine a more terrifying predicament than the one they were now in.

"Oh, do you think your father will be able to trace us to this spot, Alice?" asked Edith.

"I hope so, Edith."

"And so do I hope so. Oh, if Dick and Bob were only at home now!"

"Just what I was thinking as we came along, Edith."

"Were you?"

"Yes."

"And so was I. But that, of course, is out of the question. They are away down in New Jersey, in utter ignorance of the danger which threatens."

"So they are, Edith."

The girls little suspected that at that very moment the two youths in question were at the home of Mr. Estabrook, and that the disappearance of the two girls had been made known to them.

An hour passed.

It was now dark within the teepee.

The girls could only dimly see each other.

But they could talk, and they did so.

This served to take some of the terror of the situation away.

But not all, by any means.

They knew they were in a dangerous situation.

Presently they heard voices.

The voices became plainer.

The owners of the voices were coming nearer.



The girls listened with feelings of foreboding.

Who was coming?

Presently they recognized the voices.

"It is that dreadful Indian again!" said Edith, "and as I live I believe it is Joe Scroggs who is with him."

"You are right," replied Alice. "It is that scoundrel, Joe Scroggs, sure enough!"

"What do you make of that, Alice?"

"It looks as though Joe Scroggs has had something to do with having us captured, Edith."

"It would seem so."

The voices were close at hand now.

The girls became silent.

Then the curtain flap leading into the teepee was lifted, and a dark form was outlined against the light background made by the camp-fires.

The person entering was the Indian, Blue Wing.

Behind him was another person.

This person was, as the girls saw at a glance, the fires furnishing sufficient light to show his face fairly plain, Joe Scroggs.

"Here white girls," said Blue Wing; "white boy talk to dem all he want to; I go back."

"All right, Blue Wing," said Joe, with an air of satisfaction.

The Indian withdrew and returned to the camp-fires.

Doubtless he wished to look after the safety of his precious rifles.

He was afraid, perhaps, that some of the braves might steal them and run away.

When Blue Wing was gone Joe stepped up close to Alice, and, stepping aside, so that the light shone in her face, he looked at the girl gloatingly.

"Well," he said, in a tone of triumph, "you laffed at me this mornin', but I guess et's my time ter laff at ye, Miss Alice."

"You coward!" said Alice, with scathing scorn in her tones.

"Yes, and scoundrel!" said Edith, with spirit.

"Thet's all right. Jes' talk all ye wanten," said Joe; "et'll do ye good, an' won't do me enny harm."

"Why have you had us made prisoners of in this fashion?" asked Alice.

"Why?"

Joe felt that he had the upper hand, and could afford to play at words with the helpless girls.

"Yes, why?"

Joe laughed hoarsely.

"I sh'd think ye would know why, Alice."

"I'd thank you not to call me Alice," said the girl, with spirit.

"Ye kain't he'p yerself, an' so I'll call ye whut I pleeze, Alice," said the cowardly young scoundrel, with a chuckle.

It was at this instant that Dick reached the teepee, and paused just beside it.

He heard Joe's words.

"The cowardly whelp!" he thought; "if I had hold of him now, I'd wring his neck!"

"No, we can't help ourselves," acknowledged Alice; "we are here in your power—for the present. We will be missed, however, and will be rescued, and then woe to you, Joe Scroggs!"

"Ay, woe to you, Joe Scroggs!" said Dick to himself, setting his teeth together grimly.

Joe laughed hoarsely and scornfully.

"I'm not skeered," he said; "yer won't be foun' an' reskied in er hurry, I'm thinkin'."

"You'll see!"

An' so'll ye see—thet ye won't be foun' an' reskied," said Joe. "Nobuddy'd think ter look fur yer heer."

"Why have you had this done?" asked Alice.

"Well, ez I said afore, ye orter know, Alice, without axin', but sense ye don't seem ter know, I'll tell yer. D'ye remember how, this mornin', I tole ye I loved ye, an' axed ye would ye be my wife?"

As Dick heard this he could hardly restrain himself from rushing around and into the teepee and throttling the ignorant, ugly boor who had dared to speak of love to Alice.

"The infamous scoundrel!" Dick murmured; "the fool!—the ignoramus!—the——"

He could think of no fit appellation; none that was strong enough for the occasion.

"Don't bring that back to my mind," said Alice, in a tone of disgust. "But I don't see what that has to do with having us made prisoners of by those horrible Indians."

"Thet's very easy ter understan'," said Joe; "ye sed this mornin' ez how ye wouldn't hev ennythin' ter do with me, thet ye hated an' despised me, an' all thet sort uv thing, an' I tole ye, didn't I, thet ye would be sorry fur talkin' ter me in enny sech fashion ez thet?"

"Perhaps you did say so."

"Uv course I did, an' now I've proved my words, hain't I? I guess ye'd be willin' ter say yer sorry ye talked so a'ready, an' ef ye hain't willin' ter say et now, ye will be afore ye git erway frum heer."

The youth's tone was coarse and triumphant.

"Perhaps so—but I doubt it," said Alice, fine scorn in her tones.



"Oh, the whelp!" thought Dick.

He had to grit his teeth to keep from rushing in on Joe and giving him the throttling he so well deserved.

"I'll square accounts with him very soon, however," he said to himself; "I'll make him wish he had not attempted anything of this kind!"

"Ye won't hev enny cause ter doubt et by ther time we git through with the bizness," growled Joe.

"It takes a brave person to talk like that to a couple of girls who are helpless prisoners!" said Edith, scornfully.

"What do you expect to gain by keeping us here?" asked Alice.

"Wot do I expeck ter gain?"

"Yes."

"W'y, I expeck ter gain er good deel."

"What, for instance?"

"Well, you fur one thing."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"I don't see how you can expect anything of the kind. I told you what I thought of you this morning. I shall never change my mind regarding you."

"Mebby ye will."

"No!"

"Ye think not, hey?"

"I know it."

"Well, we'll see! I think thet by ther time ye hev be'n kep' heer er pris'ner fur er month er so, ye'll be willin' ter ergree ter marry me."

"What!—agree to marry you? Never! I would remain here a prisoner all my life, but would never consent to marry a cowardly scoundrel such as you have proven yourself to be!"

Dick's heart swelled with admiration for the beautiful girl who thus scathingly denounced the rascally youth who had so audaciously caused the capture of herself and companion.

"Glorious, Alice! Brave, noble girl!" he said to himself.

And how his fingers itched to get hold of the neck of the young miscreant inside the teepee!

Joe Scroggs seemed somewhat taken aback by this scathing denunciation.

For a few moments he was silent.

Then he gave utterance to a grunt.

"Thet's all right," he growled; "ye kin talk thet way now, but I'll bet ye won't talk ther same way arter ye've be'n heer fur er month er two!"

## CHAPTER X.

### THE RESCUE.

Dick heard most of the conversation between Joe Scroggs and the two girls.

His blood was boiling, but he did not dare attempt to do anything just then.

He would have to wait.

Later on he would square accounts with Joe Scroggs.

So he lay flat on the ground behind the teepee and listened until at last Joe got through bragging of what he was going to do, and left the tent.

"The scoundrel has gone at last!" thought Dick.

He listened and heard Joe's footsteps as he walked back toward the camp-fires.

Dick was silent, and listened to the girls, who began discussing the situation when Joe had gone.

"Oh, how I do wish Dick and Bob knew of the terrible trouble which has overtaken us!" said Alice, in a pathetic tone.

"And so do I," said Edith.

Dick could not keep silent longer.

"They do know!" he said in a low, intense tone.

"What was that?" exclaimed Alice; "I thought I heard a voice!"

"So did I, Alice!"

"You did."

Dick spoke in the same tense tone, but slightly louder.

He did not think the Indians could hear him, as they were quite a distance away.

"There! I heard it again!"

"So did I!"

There was excitement in the tones of the girls' voices now.

Then Alice asked, in a slightly louder, but cautious voice:

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Dick," the youth replied.

Little cries of delight escaped the lips of the girls.

They had their wits about them, however.

They did not let themselves speak loud enough to be heard by the Indians around the camp-fires.

"Oh, Dick, is it indeed you?" breathed Alice, joy in her tones.

"Yes, it is I, Alice, and Bob is here, too!"

"Oh this is glorious!" murmured Edith. "We will be rescued now, Alice!"

"Yes—oh, I am so glad!"



"Be brave, girls," said Dick, "and keep perfectly quiet. I will cut through the back of the teepee and enter in a few moments. Is the flap down in front of the tent?"

"Yes, it's down."

"Very well; then I can go to work at once."

Dick drew his knife

He cut a slit in the tent four or five feet long.

Then he stepped through the opening thus made.

The girls greeted him with whispered words of welcome.

Dick cut the bonds which bound Alice first, taking a kiss as he did so.

Then he severed the bonds binding Edith.

"Come!" he whispered; "some of those red fiends may take it into their heads to come this way at any moment; we must get away as quickly as possible."

He led the way to the opening he had cut in the teepee, and assisted the girls to pass through.

He was just in the act of stepping through when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

"Some one is coming!" he whispered; "we will have to run for it, and trust to getting away in the darkness of the timber."

Dick had stepped through the opening and taken his place beside the girls as he spoke, and then taking hold of an arm of each, he hastened across the open space between the teepee and the timber.

All three ran as lightly as possible.

They realized that the sound of their footsteps would hasten the approach of the Indian if he heard them.

He would discover the fact that the girls were missing soon enough, anyway.

They reached the edge of the timber just as the Indian whom they had heard approaching entered the teepee and discovered that the girls were missing.

They knew when this happened, for the Indian gave a whoop that could have been heard a mile.

Bob was just greeting the three as the whoop went up on the night air, and he seized Edith by the arm, Dick doing the same with Alice, and they hastened away through the timber as fast as they could run.

"It's going to be a hard race!" said Dick.

"Yes," replied Bob; "but we must—we will escape the scoundrels!"

They heard the shouts of the Indians, and ran with increased speed.

Dick's wits were hard at work.

He was well aware that the Indians were cunning.

So he made up his mind that they would be cunning, too.

He knew that the Indians would think that the fugitives would make as straight a course for the girls' homes as they

could go, and the result would be that the Indians would follow in that direction.

There is an old saying that "the longest way around is the shortest way home."

Perhaps Dick had never heard of the saying.

The idea was in his mind, though, just the same.

He made up his mind to go in exactly the opposite direction from their homes.

This would fool the Indians.

They would never believe that the fugitives would go in any direction but toward their homes.

By going a mile or so in a direction the opposite from the right one, they could then make a wide circuit and eventually reach their homes in safety.

So Dick believed, anyway.

And believing thus, he did not hesitate to put his plan into effect.

Dick was never turned around in the woods in the vicinity of his home.

He and Bob had been all through this timber at various times, and knew just where they were and the lay of the land.

Dick turned to the right, and ran away at right angles from the course that would have taken them in the direction of their homes.

"Where are you going, Dick?" asked Bob; "you are going almost away from home."

"I know it, Bob."

Then Dick explained his plan to his companions.

"That's a good idea, I think, Dick," said Bob.

"Yes, indeed," said Alice.

"They will certainly expect that we will go straight toward our homes," said Edith.

They ran onward as rapidly as possible.

The girls were already becoming tired, however.

Their breath was coming in short gasps.

"We'll have to slow up a bit, Bob," said Dick; "the girls can't keep up this pace."

"No, don't slow up on our account, Dick," said Alice; "we can keep on for quite a while longer, can't we, Edith?"

"Yes, Alice."

Dick was listening to the yells of the Indians.

He could tell from so doing where the Indians were and in which direction they were going.

The Indians might be cunning.

But they were not more so—indeed not so much—as Dick.

The Indians were yelling in order to terrify the fugitives.

Savages are always great believers in the efficacy of fright in enabling them to win battles.



The American Indians especially were noted for this.

They painted their faces so as to make them look as hideous as possible, and then with the addition of terrifying, blood-curdling whoops and yells, they were usually pretty successful in causing a feeling of terror to take hold upon their opponents.

But in this case they made a mistake.

Dick had seen a great many Indians in his day.

He had come to look upon them with a feeling of contempt.

He had never been afraid of them, even as a boy of eight or ten years.

And although he knew these particular Indians were at present at war with the whites, being in league with the British, in fact, he did not feel afraid.

Their yelling did not strike terror to his heart at all.

He was glad to hear them yell.

It made it possible for him to know where his enemies were.

This made it easy for himself and companions to avoid the red fiends.

Dick noted that the yelling of the Indians was growing fainter.

Feeling that they could do so with safety, he told his companions to stop running.

"We don't need to exert ourselves now," he said; "the Indians are going almost directly away from us. We can take it easy."

The girls were glad of a chance to walk and rest.

They were panting as a result of their unusual exertion.

"How does it happen that you and Bob are here, Dick?" asked Alice, presently, her curiosity getting the better of her.

"We got leave of absence for three days, Alice," was the reply, "and made up our minds to come up home and see you all."

"Well, it's lucky you did so!" said Edith; "goodness! what would have become of us if you hadn't come?"

"You might have escaped," said Bob; "father would have got the neighboring men to help him; and they would have found you, I think."

"So that scoundrel, Joe Scroggs, is at the bottom of all this, is he?" said Dick, in a hard tone of voice.

"Oh, Dick, were you in hearing distance when he was in the teepee talking to us?" exclaimed Alice.

"Yes; I heard most of the conversation."

"Then you know all, and I won't have to tell you."

"I know all, Alice; and I am surprised. I would never have supposed that Joe Scroggs could know the meaning of her word love."

"Who was he making love to?" asked Bob, who had not heard, and did not understand.

"To Alice."

"What!"

"Yes; what do you think of that?"

"I think it beats anything I ever heard of."

"He hired the Indian, Blue Wing, to capture the girls."

"He did?"

"Yes; he gave Blue Wing the rifles, one of which cost that redskin his life."

"For capturing the girls, eh?"

"Yes."

"The young scoundrel!"

"He certainly is a scoundrel, and I shall make it my business to settle with him at the earliest opportunity."

"I pity Joe Scroggs," said Bob.

They walked leisurely along, talking as they went.

Dick was confident the Indians had all gone in the opposite direction, so was not afraid of being overheard.

"We will have to walk a long distance around in order to be sure of reaching home in safety," he said; "but we can take our time to do it, and go slow. If you girls are tired we can with safety stop and rest now, I am sure."

"No, let's don't stop yet a while," said Alice.

"No, let's keep on going," said Edith; "we can keep going as long as we don't have to run."

"You are a couple of brave girls," said Dick, admiringly.

"They are certainly gritty as can be, Dick," said Bob.

"You are just trying to flatter us," said Alice.

"No, indeed, we mean it," from Dick.

Dick, by common consent, was allowed to take the lead and he led the way by a long circuit of nearly ten miles, and they reached their homes without having encountered any Indians, though they had on two or three occasions heard the whoops of the redskins far off to one side.

Dick and Bob and the rescued girls went direct to Alice's home, as they knew Dick's mother would be over there.

When they reached the house and entered, there was a scene of rejoicing such as is seldom witnessed.

The mothers of the girls wept tears of joy, and hugged and kissed Alice and Edith till Dick and Bob declared it was not fair that their mothers should have a monopoly.

This caused a laugh, and the party was indeed a happy one.

"Do you suppose there is any danger of an attempt being made by the Indians to re-capture the girls?" asked Mrs Estabrook, with some show of anxiety.

"I hardly think so," remarked Dick; "the Indians themselves do not care particularly about the matter, and I



doubt if Joe Scroggs will dare try to do anything more." It was decided that Mr. Estabrook and the two youths should take turns at keeping watch during the rest of the night, however, and this was done.

Nothing was heard of the Indians, the night passing away quietly.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DICK AND BOB GIVE JOE SCROGGS A SCARE.

Next morning, an hour or so after breakfast had been eaten, Dick said to Bob:

"Let's take a little walk, old man."

"All right," said Bob, promptly.

Dick and Edith and their mother had remained at Mr. Estabrook's all night.

"Where are you going?" asked Alice, suspiciously.

Dick laughed.

"For a walk," he replied.

"I know where they are going," said Edith, and she whispered something in Alice's ear.

Alice looked at the youths, and said:

"I wouldn't, brother, if I were you; he isn't worth bothering with."

"Oh, yes, he is," said Dick; "he needs a lesson, and I am going to take an hour off this morning and teach him one."

Then the youths took their departure, saying they would be back in an hour or so.

"Where are they going?" asked Mrs. Estabrook.

"Over to Scroggs," replied Alice.

"Ah! They are going over to settle with Joe, are they?"

"A good whipping with a horse-whip is what he needs!" said Mr. Estabrook.

Dick and Bob walked rapidly.

It was a matter of two miles to Joe's home, by way of the road, but by going through the timber they shortened this considerably.

"Do you suppose we will find him at home?" asked Bob.

"I don't know; I hope so, Bob."

The Scroggs cabin was a large log affair.

It was in the centre of a clearing of about ten acres in extent.

As Dick and Bob stepped out of the timber and approached the house, the door opened and a youth appeared in the doorway.

The youth was Joe Scroggs.

He saw them at the instant they saw him.

They heard him give utterance to a cry of alarm.

Then they saw him leap back into the house and close the door.

"There's a back door to the house, Dick!" cried Bob; "and you bet he will get out through that doorway as quickly as possible!"

"I judge you are right, Bob. Let's hurry around to the rear of the house!"

They leaped forward and ran as fast as they could.

They ran around the cabin, and as they did so, they saw Joe Scroggs running toward the timber at the top of his speed.

"Stop!" yelled Dick; "stop, or I will shoot you!"

But Joe did not stop.

Instead, the order to stop seemed to be interpreted by him as being an order to go faster.

At any rate that is what he did.

He increased his speed.

If ever there was a frightened youth, it was Joe Scroggs at that moment.

He ran like a frightened deer.

"Stop!" cried Dick again, and he set out after the fleeing youth as fast as he could go, Bob following him.

Dick was a splendid runner.

He would never have believed that Joe Scroggs, who was a rather clumsy youth, could run as fast as he could.

But now he was compelled to acknowledge that the youth was more than a match for him.

In spite of all he could do, Joe drew away from him.

Fear certainly lent wings to the youth's feet.

Dick saw he was losing ground, and, being determined the youth should not get off without having at least a good scare, he drew his pistols and fired two shots.

He did not try to hit Joe.

Much as he hated and detested the youth, and as angry as he was on account of the affair of the night before, he could not bring himself to shoot the youth.

He simply intended to frighten him so badly that the young rascal would not again attempt to bother Alice.

A howl of fear escaped the lips of Joe Scroggs as he heard the first shot.

Of course he thought the shots were intended to be deadly.

He did not know they were intended merely to frighten him.

He knew that under similar circumstances, with himself in Dick's place, he would have fired to kill.

And he judged Dick by himself.

Dick's second shot must have taken effect, however, for following the report of the pistol came a terrible, bl



curdling yell from Joe, and if he had been running fast before, he was simply flying now, for he leaped forward like an arrow released from the bow.

The youths had never seen any such running in all their life as that shown by the frightened youth.

He was to and into the timber in a jiffy.

Bob had drawn his pistols also, and he now fired a couple of shots, though he did not try to hit the flying youth.

He simply wished to aid in accelerating the youth's speed.

Feeling that it would be useless to try to catch the fugitive, the youths stopped running.

They turned around and walked back the way they had come.

As they approached the house, the back door opened, and a woman emerged from the house.

It was Mrs. Scroggs, Joe's mother.

She was a thin-faced, careworn-looking woman, and there was a look of sorrow on her face, but no anger, as she addressed Dick and Bob.

"Ye didn't kill my boy?" she asked, her voice trembling; "please say that ye didn't kill him!"

Dick and Bob both felt sorry for the poor woman.

"We did not kill him, Mrs. Scroggs," Dick said, kindly.

"We did not try to hit him; we merely fired off our pistols to frighten him."

"Oh, thank Heaven fur thet!" the woman said, fervently. "I know Joe hain't ez good er boy ez he orter be, Dick, but he is all I hev ter love, since—since my husband—died."

The woman hesitated, and was evidently sorry she had mentioned her husband.

There was reason for this.

Dick had shot and mortally wounded her husband nearly a year before.

The deed was entirely justifiable and excusable, however.

Mr. Scroggs was a Tory, and the leader of the Tories of the neighborhood, while Dick's father was an outspoken patriot.

All the Tories hated Mr. Slater, and they had ridden to his home one day in a body, and had called him out, and Hank Scroggs had shot Mr. Slater dead.

Dick was there, and, wild with anger and sorrow, he had run into the house, seized his father's rifle, and, running out to the road, he shot Hank Scroggs, inflicting a mortal wound.

Mrs. Scroggs was well aware of this fact, of course.

"It is too bad that Joe doesn't behave himself better, Mrs. Scroggs," said Dick.

"Whut hez he be'n doin'?" the woman asked.

Dick told her.

"I am sorry," she said, beginning to weep; "I can't do ennything with him. I wish thet I could."

"You are not to blame," said Dick, kindly; "don't let it worry you a particle."

"I can't help it, Dick. He is my son, and I can't help feeling bad when he does things he ortenter do."

"True enough."

The woman looked at the youths wistfully.

"Whut air ye goin' ter do, Dick?" she asked; "air ye still ergoin' ter try ter hurt Joe fur whut he done las' night?"

Dick shook his head.

"No," he said; "I have just given him a good scare, and that will be enough. It is a better revenge than if I had crippled or even killed him—and of course I had no intention of doing the latter."

"Oh, I'm so glad ter heer ye say thet, Dick!" the woman said; "an' I'll do all I kin ter git him ter be er better boy!"

"Very well; you can tell him this from me, Mrs. Scroggs: If he behaves himself and lets Bob's folks and mine alone, we will not bother him any more on account of what he did last night; but if he bothers them again we will never rest until we have made him suffer for it. Will you tell him?"

"Yes, yes! I'll tell 'em, Dick."

"Very well; and I hope for his sake and yours, as well as for our own, that he will heed the warning. If he does not heed it, he will wish that he had done so."

"I am sure he'll be more keerful whut'he does arter this, Dick."

"It will be better for all concerned if he does exercise more care in future," said Dick.

"I hope you did not hurt him seriously, Dick," remarked Mrs. Slater, when they returned home.

"No, we didn't hurt him any to speak of, mother, dear," replied Dick.

"We simply scared him half to death," laughed Bob.

"What did you do to him, Bob?" asked Edith.

"Nothing in particular, Edith."

"Tell us."

"Well, he saw us coming," said Bob, "and he ran into the house, through it and out at the back doorway, and ran for the timber with all his might."

"Yes."

"We had an idea that was what he would do, so we ran



as fast as we could, and when we got around to the back of the house we saw him running at a great rate."

"I'll warrant you he was scared."

"I can see him running," said Alice.

"And he was running, too," laughed Bob; "wasn't he, Dick?"

"He was making pretty good headway, Bob," with a smile.

"He was going like the wind. Well, Dick yelled to him to stop, but Joe wouldn't stop; he ran faster than ever."

"I'll warrant you he did," said Edith.

"He must have been terribly frightened," said Mrs. Estabrook.

"And served him right," said Alice.

"We tried to catch Joe," went on Bob; "but it was no use. He was too fast for us. We couldn't hold our own with him, so we decided to take it out in scaring him, and we pulled our pistols and fired four shots after him."

"Goodness! do you suppose you hit him?" asked Edith.

"We didn't try," with a grin; "we just wanted to see how fast Joe could run when he was right badly scared."

"Did you find out how fast he could run?" asked Bob's father.

"I should say so, father. He ran like a streak."

"I judge that he is running yet," smiled Dick.

"Well, I am glad you gave him a good scare," said Alice. "It may serve to keep him from trying any more such tricks as that of last night."

"I don't think he will try anything more in that line; I told his mother to tell him that if he did try any more such work that it would not be good for him."

"You saw his mother, then?" asked Mrs. Slater.

"Yes, mother."

"Poor woman! I feel sorry for her."

"So do I."

Dick and Bob remained there all that day and next night, and then early the next morning they started on their return to the patriot army at Middlebrook, N. J.

The distance to be traversed was about sixty miles; and it would take them all day.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE YOUTHS LEARN SOMETHING OF INTEREST.

The youths made their way southward.

Usually when coming to their homes from down in New Jersey the youths crossed the Hudson at Dobb's Ferry.

The ferryman there had been a patriot, and they knew they could trust him.

But recently he had sold his ferry-boat and business to another man.

And the new ferryman was a rank Tory.

So Dick and Bob decided to go down the river to a point a short distance below Fort Washington on the upper end of Manhattan Island.

On the opposite shore, not far from Fort Lee, was a patriot who had a small ferry-boat.

If they could attract his attention and get him to come across they could go across the river on his boat.

As Dick and Bob had crossed there before, and had an understanding with the ferryman regarding signals to use when wanting to get across, they felt that they would be safe in going on down.

So they rode on southward on the east side of the river.

The youths rode at a good pace.

They made better time than they had expected to make.

Their horses had had a good rest, and were willing to go.

The result was that they reached the north end of Manhattan Island much sooner than they had expected.

Having more time than they thought they would have, Dick suggested that they ride on down into the city and see if they could learn anything that might be of interest or of value to General Washington, the commander-in-chief of the patriot army.

Bob was right in for going.

He was always ready for anything that promised excitement.

So they headed their horses southward, and rode onward at a gallop.

An hour later they were in the city.

They rode straight to a livery stable where they had often left their horses when in the city.

They left the horses there, and walked down the street.

"What if we should be seen and recognized, Dick?" asked Bob.

The youths had been in New York City on several occasions as spies, and were known to many of the British soldiers and officers.

"I don't think there is much danger, Bob."

"No, I guess there isn't a great deal."

Of course the chances were that they might walk the streets all day and meet hundreds of redcoats and not see one who knew them, and then again they might run onto one who knew them at any moment.

"We'll keep our eyes open, Bob, and if we see any one whom we know, we will avoid him."

"Yes, that will be the wisest course, I think."



The youths were walking along, and presently found themselves immediately behind two British officers.

One was a captain, the other a colonel.

Their attention was attracted to the conversation which the two were carrying on.

The British officers, of course, did not suspect that any one was listening to their conversation, and they talked freely.

"So you are to take the gold over to New Brunswick, colonel?" asked the captain.

This was the remark which attracted the youths' attention, and with a significant look at each other, they walked quietly along behind the redcoats, and while outwardly careless and inattentive, they were straining their hearing to the utmost to take in everything that was said by the two.

"Yes, I'm to take it—that is, from near Perth Amboy."

"Oh, it is not to be taken all the way by wagon, then?"

"No; it will be taken off the ship in a boat, and transferred by the boat to an old house a mile north of Perth Amboy. There is a team and wagon there, and I am to go there with four men, and transfer the gold from the house to the wagon, and then convey it to New Brunswick."

"I see. Well, it seems like rather a foolish transaction this taking the gold down to the soldiers at New Brunswick, don't you think? What can they do with it? They can't spend it there, can they?"

"Well, yes; there are things they can buy there, such as pipes, tobacco, liquor and other luxuries with which to tickle the palate; and then, you know, lots of the men are inveterate gamblers, and they wish their pay, so they will have money with which to gamble."

"True enough. Well, it is safe enough, anyway, so it does not matter, I judge."

"Oh, no; it doesn't matter. The men might as well have their pay, as it is perfectly safe to take it to them."

"When is the gold to be taken down?"

"To-night."

"At what hour?"

"I don't know at what hour the boat will go down. I have orders to leave here at nine o'clock to-night. That will make it about midnight, or perhaps a little later, when we reach the house in question. Then by the time we load the gold into the wagon and get ready to start to New Brunswick it will be half-past one, or perhaps two o'clock."

"I see; then you will reach New Brunswick early in the morning."

"Yes."

The two men began talking on another subject of no particular interest to Dick and Bob, and they walked

slower, and allowed the British officers to draw away from them.

Dick drew Bob into an opening between two buildings.

"Bob," he said, his voice vibrating with eagerness, "I have an idea."

"Of course you have," replied Bob, with a grin; "and I know what it is."

"You do?" with a smile.

"Yes."

"What is it, then?"

"You have made up your mind to secure that gold."

Dick nodded vigorously.

"Right, Bob! There will no doubt be a big lot of gold, and the patriot cause is suffering from the want of money."

"Oh, there certainly will be a lot of it, Dick. Just think of the number of soldiers down there! There will be enough gold to pay the patriot soldiers all that is now owing them, and for months in advance."

"You are right, Bob; and we must—we will, secure that money!"

"But how will we do it, Dick? The two of us can hardly hope to accomplish it alone."

"We won't have to try to do it alone, Bob."

"No?"

"No; we will go and get our horses and ride away at once. We will reach Middlebrook at the earliest possible moment which will be by seven o'clock this evening; then we will take our company of brave 'Liberty Boys' and make our way across to the vicinity of Perth Amboy under cover of darkness. We will be able to find the house the redcoats had reference to, I am sure, and then the rest will be easy and simple."

"We will wait till the men bring the gold, and then gobble it up, eh?"

"Yes; but I think we will wait till the colonel and his assistants get there, and make them prisoners."

"That will be a good idea."

"I think so; come, Bob. Let us be going."

The youths hastened away up the street in the direction from which they had recently come.

They got their horses, mounted and rode away.

An hour later they were on the bank of the Hudson at a point only a mile from Fort Washington.

Dick fired his pistol in the air, and then a few moments later fired the other one.

A few minutes later a flat-boat was seen leaving the shore on the opposite side of the river.

"There comes Hampton!" said Dick, with an air of satisfaction. "I was afraid he might be away, and we would be delayed in getting across the river."



"That would have been bad, Dick."

"Yes, indeed!"

Hampton was soon across, and he greeted the youths cordially.

He knew Dick and Bob, and as he was a strong patriot, he liked the youths for the good work for the cause of liberty which they had done.

The youths led their horses onto the flat-boat, and then were taken across the river.

Dick offered to pay Hampton, but he would have nothing.

"Yer welcome," he said; "an' I wusht I c'u'd on'y do more fur ye. Whenever ye wants ter git ercross ther river, come ter me, an' I'll take ye ercross an' et shan't cost ye a cent."

"Thank you," said Dick, heartily, and then he and Bob shook hands with the good-hearted ferryman, bade him good-by, and rode away.

They rode steadily all the afternoon, having got something for themselves to eat, and feed for their horses at a farm-house at about two o'clock, and reached Middlebrook at half-past seven o'clock.

As soon as they had put their horses in the stable allotted to the use of the "Liberty Boys" for their horses, they went to their quarters and washed and ate supper.

Then Dick went straight to headquarters.

The commander-in-chief was in, and greeted Dick pleasantly, and inquired if he and Bob had had a pleasant visit with their folks.

Dick told the commander-in-chief that they had enjoyed their visit very much.

Then he told the commander-in-chief what they had learned by overhearing the conversation of the British officers on the street in New York.

General Washington's eyes shone eagerly as he listened to Dick's story.

"That is the best news I have heard in a long time," he said. "Dick, my boy, we must have that gold."

"That is what I had decided, sir."

"Yes, indeed! We are needing it very, very badly indeed. Our soldiers have had no money for weeks, and some of them for months past, and they are beginning to grumble—and I don't blame them. If we can secure this gold, we can pay them every cent that is due them and have considerable left."

"I think so, sir."

"Yes, for the sum must be a large one, if it is to be sufficient for paying the British soldiers even one month's wages."

"I should judge so, your excellency."

General Washington looked at Dick in a calculating manner.

"What are your ideas regarding this matter, Dick?" he asked, presently; "do you wish to have charge of the men who go to make this capture?"

Dick's eyes shone

"I should like it very much, your excellency."

"So I thought; and the men—have you any choice regarding the men you shall take with you on this task?"

There was a peculiar half-smile on Washington's face.

He knew that Dick would prefer to take his own men—the brave and dashing "Liberty Boys."

Dick saw the half-smile and understood.

"Yes, your excellency," he said; "if you have no objections, I should like to take my company of 'Liberty Boys.' I think we will be able to do the work, and capture the gold, and the men with it."

"I am sure you will be able to do it, Dick; and I will say that there are no other men in my army whom I would rather trust to do this work than the company of 'Liberty Boys,' especially when you are along to command them. I have tried you thoroughly, Dick, and I have never found you wanting; I am willing to trust this affair entirely to you, and will leave you to work in your own way."

Dick flushed with pleasure.

He was a modest youth, but this praise from the great commander-in-chief of the patriot army could not but be pleasing to him.

"Thank you, your excellency," he said, feelingly; "I will take my company of 'Liberty Boys,' and will go to the house and be here in readiness, and when the gold is brought there, we will capture it and the men with it."

"I am not afraid but what you will succeed in doing so, Dick."

The commander-in-chief and the youth talked the matter over for some little time longer, and then Dick bade the great man good-night and withdrew.

He hastened back to the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys."

While he was gone Bob had told the youths—there being an entire company made up of young fellows of an average age of eighteen years—that there would be work for them that night.

Then he had told them what he and Dick had learned in New York.

So when Dick re-entered the quarters, all looked at him with eager inquiry.

"Are we to go, Dick?" asked Bob, eagerly.

Dick nodded.

"Yes," he said; "you have told the boys?"



"Yes."

"Well, our company of 'Liberty Boys' is to go, and the quicker we get ready, the better."

There was bustle and confusion in the quarters for the next few minutes.

Then the "Liberty Boys" filed out, and made their way to the place where the horses were kept.

Fifteen minutes later the horses were saddled and bridled.

Then the youths mounted.

"Forward!" ordered Dick.

And the company of "Liberty Boys" rode away into the darkness.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE LIBERTY BOYS' LUCK.

They all realized that they were going on a dangerous errand.

Not that the capture of the gold and a guard with it would be dangerous; there would not be enough of the red-coats to make this dangerous.

The danger lay in the fact that in reaching the house near Perth Amboy—the house in which the gold was to be delivered from the boat—they would have to traverse a strip of country within the control of the British.

The distance to Perth Amboy was about eighteen miles.

The direction was almost due east.

In going, they would go within three miles of the British army at New Brunswick.

It was likely that scouting parties and foragers would be out, and the "Liberty Boys" might run onto them at any moment.

In that case there would be a fight, and the trouble was that this would give the alarm, and more parties of British would come out in search of the youths, and they would have hard work doing the work on which they were bent.

So Dick cautioned the youths to keep quiet.

"Everybody keep as quiet as possible," he said; "and keep a sharp lookout. We don't want to encounter any of the enemy if we can possibly help it."

"That's right," said Bob; "we are after big game to-night, and we don't want to take any chances on losing it by getting mixed up with some other parties of the British. We must have eyes and ears only for the party having the gold in charge."

"That is the idea, exactly," agreed Dick.

The youths were as quiet as they could be, and about the only noise heard was that made by the hoofs of the horses.

It was about nine o'clock when the youths had started.

The distance to Perth Amboy being nearly eighteen miles, it would take them till nearly midnight to reach their destination.

This being the case, they would be unable to get there much ahead of the colonel and his men.

Dick did not know exactly where the house was, and realized that a delay of half an hour or so might result on this account.

Therefore he felt that it would be best to travel tolerably fast, so as to gain a little time.

They rode at a gallop a good portion of the time, it being light enough so that they could see fairly well, the moon giving some light.

Dick headed straight for Perth Amboy, and kept on in this direction till the village was almost reached; then he turned to the left and rode northward.

The house in question was about a mile north of Perth Amboy, the officers had said.

So Dick felt that they ought not to lose a great deal of time in finding it.

Nor did they.

They reached the vicinity of the house in question at a few minutes before midnight.

They dismounted at a point perhaps two hundred yards distant and walked to the house.

To their surprise, there was a team and wagon in front of the house.

The wagon was backed up against the front door.

"The officer and his men have reached here ahead of us," whispered Dick to Bob; "and they are no doubt getting ready to transfer the gold from the house into the wagon."

"You are right, Dick," agreed Bob.

As they drew nearer they saw that there were a couple of men in the wagon.

It happened that the attention of the two was toward the door of the house.

The door was open, and the men were peering in through the doorway.

They knew, no doubt, that the stuff they were to take away was gold, and they were waiting eagerly to get a sight of the precious load.

This was fortunate for the "Liberty Boys."

It gave them the chance they were looking for.

They slipped up close to the wagon and seized the two fellows before they knew what had happened.

Strong hands clutched the throats of the two British



soldiers, and they were unable to so much as cry out to warn those within the house.

They were quickly bound hand and foot and gagged. Then Dick led the way into the house, the "Liberty Boys" following in obedience to a signal.

They tip-toed, so as to make as little noise as possible. To their surprise, there was no one in the house at all. Dick could not understand this at first.

Then suddenly he heard voices.

They seemed to come from below.

"They are in the cellar," he whispered to Bob.

Then he led the way into the kitchen.

A candle burned there, making a fitful light, but enough for the needs of the youths.

Following Dick's lead, they stole down the cellar stairway.

There were several redcoats in the cellar.

Among them was the British colonel Dick had seen in New York the day before.

On the floor was a strong, iron-bound chest.

The lid was up, and the men were looking at the contents.

They had a couple of lanterns, and these furnished the necessary light.

It seemed that they had been checking off the contents of the chest, and had just finished.

Their attention was on the chest.

Otherwise they would have discovered the advent upon the scene of the "Liberty Boys."

As it was, they did not know any others than themselves in the cellar until they felt themselves seized in strong hands.

Then they cried out in surprise and alarm.

They tried to struggle.

They made desperate efforts to break loose from the hold of those who had grasped them.

All to no purpose.

The "Liberty Boys" had entered the cellar in such numbers that there were three or four to each redcoat, and the men were helpless.

Struggle as they might, they could do nothing.

They could only give vent to cries and curses, intermingled with threats.

But this availed them nothing.

In a few minutes all were prisoners, and all were bound hand and foot with the exception of the colonel, whose hands only were bound.

"Take those fellows up and place them in the wagon," instructed Dick.

The "Liberty Boys" hastened to obey.

When the men had been carried upstairs Dick turned to the British officer.

"Well, colonel, we seem to have the better of it just at present," he said.

"Who are you?" he asked, haughtily.

"I am Dick Slater, at your service," replied Dick, calmly; "though doubtless you have never heard of me."

The officer started.

"Yes, I have heard of you," he said, and he looked at the youth with an interested air. "I have heard a great deal about you. And so you are the wonderful boy spy, and captain of the 'Liberty Boys of '76,' are you?"

"Yes," replied Dick, modestly.

Then he turned his attention to the iron-bound chest.

"So this is gold," he said; "genuine English gold."

"But you will not dare take the gold," the officer cried. "It belongs to the crown—to King George."

"We care nothing about King George," said Dick, calmly; "we do not recognize him as our king; we have no king, and this gold we shall confiscate."

"You will not dare!"

"Oh, yes," with a smile. "This British gold will be of great help to the patriots in their fight for liberty," said Dick. "General Washington will be much obliged to you for your contribution, colonel, I am sure."

The officer groaned.

Evidently he did not appreciate Dick's humor.

"You will not be able to take it away," he said; "some of the companies of our soldiers which are constantly circulating around in this vicinity will be sure to capture you and recover the gold."

"I hardly think so," smiled Dick. "We will risk it, anyway."

The youths then examined the gold.

The iron-bound chest was filled with bags of gold, and with crisp Bank of England notes, and the eyes of the youths sparkled at the wonderful sight.

"Say, this will prove very acceptable to the commander-in-chief, old man," said Bob, enthusiastically.

"Indeed it will, Bob."

"Hadh't we better be getting it upstairs?"

"I guess we had, Bob."

Dick was on the point of giving the order to some of the "Liberty Boys," when the voice of one came down from upstairs:

"There is a band of horsemen coming, Dick! We can hear the hoofbeats of the horses! You had better hurry!"

An exclamation of delight escaped the British officer.

"I told you so!" he said, triumphantly; "you will be



whipped and driven away, and we will be rescued and the gold recovered."

"I don't think so," said Dick.

Then he turned to the boys.

"Carry the chest upstairs," he ordered.

Four of the "Liberty Boys" seized the chest.

It was very heavy.

It was as much as they could do to lift it.

A couple more of the youths got hold.

The six of them were enabled to carry the chest.

They managed to get up the stairs with it.

Dick followed.

He brought the officer along.

The chest was carried to the front door.

Willing hands reached down and seized the chest, a number of "Liberty Boys" being in the wagon.

The chest was lifted up and deposited in the wagon.

Then the officer was assisted into the wagon.

The other prisoners were there already.

"Now, Sam," said Dick to Sam Sunderland, "get hold of the lines and drive toward Middlebrook as fast as you can. We will keep behind you and fight the British off."

Sam obeyed.

He leaped up onto the seat and seized the lines.

He clucked to the horses, and they started.

He drove out into the road, and started in the direction of Middlebrook.

The sound of hoofbeats could be heard plainly now.

Evidently a band of horsemen was close at hand.

Dick gave the order to mount.

The "Liberty Boys" ran at once to where their horses were hitched.

They mounted.

The coming horsemen were close at hand now.

It happened that the moon was obscured by a cloud.

Dick was in hope that the cloud would stay over the moon.

If it did so, they might be able to get away without being seen.

He hoped that they might be enabled to do so.

He hoped so for several reasons.

First, he did not wish to engage in a fight with the redcoats on this night, as he had already gotten what he had come after, and wished to get back to the patriot army.

They were in the domains of the enemy.

If they were to become engaged with the enemy the entire British army would be aroused.

They were not far from the main encampment.

The sound of firing would be easily heard there.

So Dick wished to avoid an engagement if possible.

But this was not to be.

The moon presently broke through the clouds and shone out clear and bright.

Dick looked back.

Not more than a quarter of a mile away was a body of horsemen.

That they were British dragoons there could be no doubt.

Dick knew they would be seen.

This was inevitable.

Therefore the yell which went up from the horsemen did not surprise him in the least.

He was expecting it.

He would have been surprised had he not heard it.

"They've seen us, Dick," said Bob, who rode beside him.

"Yes, Bob."

"What are you going to do—stop and show fight?"

"No, we will give them a running fight of it, Bob."

Dick looked ahead.

Sam was making the horses attached to the wagon go at as fast a gait as possible.

He realized the necessity for haste.

"They are bound to catch up with us, though," he thought.

There could be no doubt regarding this.

It could not be expected that a wagon could be pulled by a team as rapidly as horses could go that were ridden.

Suddenly the night air was punctured by the crack crack! of pistol shots.

"They are too far away to do us damage with small arms," thought Dick.

And this was the case.

The bullets from the pistols fell to the ground before reaching the "Liberty Boys."

But the redcoats were gaining.

They would soon be within pistol-shot distance.

Then the "Liberty Boys" would be in danger.

Dick looked back.

He sized up the horsemen as well as he could.

"They don't outnumber us so very greatly," he thought. "If it becomes necessary, I think we can stop and fight them back."

He was always eager for a fight.

He did not like the idea of running from the redcoat.

"Let's stop and give 'em a taste of cold lead, Dick," he said.

But Dick said:

"Wait a while, Bob."

A few minutes later there came another volley from the redcoats.



Two of the "Liberty Boys" were wounded this time, and Dick thought it time to do something.

"Halt!" he cried.

The company of "Liberty Boys" came to a stop promptly.

The majority were like Bob, eager for a fight.

"Ready!" ordered Dick.

Up came the muskets.

"Fire!"

Crash.

All fired at the same instant, and the crash was deafening.

It was an effective volley, too, judging by the yells of pain and rage which came from the redcoats.

"Now forward again!" cried Dick. "Load as you go!"

The youths obeyed.

"Whirling their horses, they rode onward after the wagon.

They loaded their muskets as they rode—no easy task.

The "Liberty Boys" had practiced it, however, until they had become proficient in the art.

They could load their muskets while their horses were going at a full run, and never spill the powder nor drop the bullet.

The volley from the muskets of the "Liberty Boys" dampened the ardor of the pursuing redcoats to a considerable degree.

They kept up the pursuit, however.

Doubtless they hoped that the sound of the firing might attract the attention of more of the British and bring friends to their aid.

Presently they drew nearer again.

"They are going to fire another volley," thought Dick.

This proved to be the case.

As in the former instance, the volley did little or no damage, however.

"Mighty poor shots, those chaps," said Bob.

When they had got their muskets loaded, Dick was ready to give their pursuers another volley.

"Halt!" he cried.

The "Liberty Boys" came to a stop.

"Take aim!" was the next order.

"Fire!"

Crash! Roar!

Again they had done good execution, judging by the yells and curses which went up from the redcoats.

The British were evidently getting more than they bargained for.

"Forward!" cried Dick; "and load as you go!"

Again they whirled their horses.

Up the road they went at a gallop.

They were soon up with the wagon, and then the horses had to slow down to a walk.

Then the "Liberty Boys" proceeded to load their muskets again.

The British were drawing near once more by this time.

They tried to slip up to within pistol-shot distance, but Dick would not allow this.

He ordered the "Liberty Boys" to fire, and they poured another volley into the ranks of the redcoats.

This threw the British into such confusion that they could not fire the volley as they had intended, and by the time they were straightened out again the youths were out of pistol-shot distance.

The "Liberty Boys" loaded their muskets again.

"We are doing first rate, Dick," said Bob.

"Yes, we have nothing to complain of as yet, Bob," replied Dick.

"Say, let's charge 'em next time, Dick."

"I've been thinking of it, Bob."

"Have you?" eagerly.

"Yes."

"Good! Let's do it, old man!"

"I will see what the rest of the boys think about it before deciding," he said.

Then he lifted up his voice loud enough so all the "Liberty Boys" could hear him, but not loud enough for the British to hear, and cried:

"What do you say to charging them next time, boys?"

"We say yes, Dick!" was the reply from the youths in a manner not to be mistaken. "Let's charge 'em!"

"All right!" he called out; "we will fire another volley from our muskets and then charge the redcoats, and when we are close enough, we will fire volleys from our pistols. Then we will charge them with fixed bayonets!"

A cheer went up from the youths.

"Be quiet, fellows!" called Dick; "the redcoats will know we are up to some trick!"

"That's right; never thought of that," said Sam Sunderland.

The British heard the youths cheer, no doubt.

They could not have helped hearing it.

But they probably did not understand its meaning.

At any rate, it did not put a stop to their plan of procedure.

They came on in pursuit.

They came as close as they thought they dared, and then fired a volley.

A few of the bullets from the pistols reached the youths, but did no particular damage.



Then Dick decided that it was the proper time for his boys to act.

"Get ready!" he cried.

The youths leveled their muskets.

"Take aim!"

Dick waited a few moments for the boys to take aim, and then gave the order:

"Fire!"

Crash! Roar!

Then wild yells of rage and pain went up from the redcoats.

"Forward!" cried Dick.

The youths urged their horses forward.

They rode at a gallop.

And straight toward the redcoats.

"Ready with your pistols!" cried Dick.

The youths drew their pistols.

"Fire!" ordered Dick.

Crash! Roar!

Wild cheers went up from the "Liberty Boys."

Yells, groans and curses went up from the redcoats.

"With the other pistol, boys!" cried Dick.

A cheer was the reply.

"Ready! Fire!"

Crash! Roar!

Again the "Liberty Boys" gave utterance to wild cheers.

And still louder groans, yells and curses went up from the redcoats.

They were getting decidedly more than they had bargained for.

It looked as if the pursuers would soon be the pursued.

And it so proved.

"Charge bayonets!" cried Dick.

They were close enough to the British now, so that they could hear Dick and understand him.

They heard him say "Charge bayonets!"

The order gave them a terrible fright.

They were already in confusion.

The three volleys that had been fired by the "Liberty Boys" had thrown them into disorder, and now to learn that a bayonet charge was to come on top of all the rest was too much.

They felt that this was the straw too much.

So when they saw the company of "Liberty Boys" coming charging down the road, they gave utterance to wild yells of fright and broke and fled.

The "Liberty Boys" gave vent to cheers, and followed the fleeing redcoats a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile, and then Dick gave the order to stop.

The youths obeyed the order, and then they rode back up the road.

The wagon had stopped to wait for the youths to come up, and Dick was glad of it, for there were a number of wounded redcoats, and they were taken up and placed in the wagon.

Then the journey was resumed.

Dick and the "Liberty Boys" were well pleased.

They had captured twenty thousand pounds of gold, had captured the men who had been sent along with the gold, this including an officer, and now they had put the British to rout and had captured some more of them.

"Say, Dick, we've been lucky to-night," said Bob, enthusiastically.

"Yes, and yesterday and the day before, too, Bob," replied Dick. "We were in luck to get home in time to rescue the girls, and now we have been in luck again, as you say, in capturing this gold and these redcoats."

"Jove! but General Washington will be pleased when you get back with the gold and the prisoners, won't he?"

"Indeed he will, Bob."

"What a lucky thing that was, our overhearing the officers on the street in New York when they were talking about the gold, Dick!"

"Yes, as I said a moment ago, we have been very lucky, Bob."

The "Liberty Boys" reached Middlebrook and the patriot army in safety.

They did not encounter any more prowling bands of redcoats.

The prisoners were placed in the guard-house—with the exception of the badly-wounded ones, who were taken to the hospital.

Then the gold was taken out of the wagon and carried into the building occupied by General Washington for his headquarters.

Then the youths went to their quarters and lay down, feeling that they had done their full duty.

Next morning they were more than repaid for what they had done by the praise which they received from General Washington.

He held an informal reception and had every member of the company of "Liberty Boys" come to his quarters and shake hands with him.

He spoke words of praise to each and every one, and then went forth from the building feeling very proud and capable of doing even greater things.

When Dick had shaken hands with the great man, he asked the youth for a detailed story of the entire affair.



Dick gave it, and the story was listened to with interest by the commander-in-chief and the members of his staff.

"You did remarkably well, Dick—remarkably well!" General Washington declared.

"You certainly did, Dick!" said General Greene.

"We were very lucky, I should say, your excellency," said Dick. "We were lucky in hearing the two officers talk about the gold, and then we have been favored by fortune all the way through the affair."

"Well, you and your 'Liberty Boys' are brave and rewarded," said General Washington, "and fortune always favors the brave."

"That is the reason fortune has favored you, then, your excellency," said Dick.

"Well said!" exclaimed General Greene. "He has paid you back in your own coin, your excellency."

The commander-in-chief smiled.

"So I see," he replied. "Well, Dick, I certainly owe a great deal to you and the 'Liberty Boys.' The gold which you last night secured will be of immense benefit to us, and will enable us to go ahead in good style. We will now be able to pay the men their wages."

"I am glad if my 'Liberty Boys' and myself have been

of benefit to the great cause of liberty, your excellency," said Dick, earnestly.

"Nobly spoken!" said the commander-in-chief; "I don't know what I should have done without you and your 'Liberty Boys.' You have been of immense aid to the great cause."

"And we hope to be of still greater benefit in the future, your excellency," said Dick.

### THE END.

The next number (14) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS' RUSE; OR, FOOLING THE BRITISH," by Harry Moore.

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